

## **Data-Driven Approaches to Eliminate the Achievement Gap for English Language Learners: Learning From the Success of Community Day Charter Public School**

### **Slides 1–3**

PEGGIE: Welcome everyone. This is Peggie Garcia from the National Charter School Resource Center. Thank you for joining us today. I have muted everyone on the phone for the initial part of the webinar, but if you would like to speak up and ask a question later during the Q and A, you can certainly unmute yourself by using STAR 6. The National Charter School Resource Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education to promote effective practices, provide technical assistance, and disseminate resources to charter schools across the country. We're focusing on English language learners [ELLs] this year. We have a 12-webinar series on ELLs, and this is the third of the series. We are really excited to welcome Community Day Charter Public School here, and they're going to talk a little bit more about their very exciting program in a few minutes.

Let me just give you a quick orientation to the webinar platform if you have not joined us for a webinar before. If you'd like to enter a question at any point during the webinar, please go ahead and do that in the chat window on the left-hand side. You can enter a question at any time; we'll probably hold the questions until the Q and A at the end, but please feel free to enter your questions throughout the webinar. Below the chat panel, there's a file share window, and the Community Day slides file is the PowerPoint that they're going to be delivering this afternoon. If you did not receive the reminder that I sent this morning with the PowerPoint attached, you're welcome to open that up and print it out at any time, so that you can go ahead and take notes right on the PowerPoint. If you'd like to make the screen a little bit larger, you can also use the full-screen button, which is on the upper right-hand side. If you're participating over the phone, please mute your computer speakers to prevent an echo effect. If you would like to listen over the phone and were not prompted to join, your phone number, the conference number, and the participant code are in the chat window. If you are listening over your computer, please note that your bandwidth will affect the quality of the audio during the webinar. To have the highest quality audio possible, you should have a wired connection for your computer rather than a wireless one. You should close as many



applications that are running as possible—ideally, you’d just have Adobe running on your computer—and clear your browser’s cache and cookies.

The webinar is being recorded. An archive will be available after the webinar at [www.charterschoolcenter.org/webinars](http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/webinars). It usually takes us two or three business days to post that, so it should be available by next Wednesday afternoon at the latest. I think that’s all of the technical overview I have.

## **Slide 4**

I’m going to go ahead and introduce our distinguished presenters today. We’re really lucky to have with us Erin Walsh-Hagan and Pat Teichman from Community Day Charter Public School. Erin is the head of the Lower School and Pat is the head of the Early Learning Center. The Community Day Charter Public School [AUDIO SKIP] participates in the Effective Practice Incentive Community, which is a large group of charter schools across the nation. What they do is reward schools on an annual basis for making significant academic achievement gains with high-needs populations. This program has been running for five years and, in each of the five years, Community Day Charter Public School has been recognized as either a silver or gold winner every year. There’s quite a small number of charter schools on that list every year, and for each of the last five years they’ve been either on the silver or gold list, so that’s quite an accomplishment. We’re really excited to have them here with us so they can tell us more about how they’re getting those gains with all of their students, particularly with ELLs. With that, I’m going to go ahead and turn it over to Erin and Pat. I invite you to share more about your school and about your backgrounds and yourselves. Welcome.

## **Slide 5**

ERIN: Thank you, Peggie. My name is Erin Walsh-Hagan and I am the head of the Lower School. Just a little bit about myself: I’ve been at the school for... this is my eighth year. When I began at Community Day, I was a special education teacher for about four years. I transitioned to the reading specialist at the school and, for the last two years, I’ve been the head of the Lower School.

**PAT:** My name is Pat Teichman. This is year number 13 for me at Community Day Charter School, and before I became the head of school about nine years ago, I was the kindergarten teacher at Community Day. Both Erin, I, and the other head of school who is Mary Chance, the head of the upper school, have all been former teachers in the classroom before we became administrative leaders.

**ERIN:** Today, we're going to talk a little bit about our data-driven approach to eliminating the achievement gap for ELLs. We'll go through a little bit about the background of our school, some of our recognition and our achievements, and then we'll get into what our model looks like and how we have developed an approach to using data that we think contributes considerably to the success that we've had with all students, but particularly our ELLs.

## **Slide 6**

**PAT:** A little bit to tell you who we are. We're from Lawrence, Massachusetts. That's about 30 minutes north of Boston. We are a gateway city. We have a large Hispanic immigrant population in the whole city. Community Day Charter School is one of the first Commonwealth charters granted in 1995, so we've renewed our charter a few times since then. We have 331 students. The K1 is four-year-old kindergarten, and we designate that as K1, and then we also have five-year-old kindergarten, which is K2, through eighth grade. We'll be talking a little bit more about how we've closed the achievement gap for the past four years. We're opening two new charters in Lawrence next year; we just had our lottery on Wednesday and we actually had 2,226 applications for our K–8 school. Next year, for our new schools that are opening up, there will be a K1 through grade 1 school for each one of them, and we will add a grade each year until we hit the eighth grade.

## **Slide 7**

**ERIN:** A little bit about our mission. The school here is really committed to working with the community. We think that Lawrence is an amazing place to live and we want to draw upon all of the positive aspects of our city. We also are focused on the unique learning styles of each student, and we make sure that all of our learning experiences have clearly stated goals and that students are working towards their goals in individual areas. We

also make sure that our families are incredibly involved in the process, so we do a lot of parent outreach. We have amazing [AUDIO SKIP] design the school and they're very committed to everything that happens within CDCPS.

## Slide 8

PAT: Demographics of our school: We're 89.4 percent Hispanic; 82 percent first language not English. For us, we are a Spanish-speaking community, so our first language, not English, is all Spanish speaking. Thirty-five percent of those are designated as limited English proficient, 74 percent low income, and 13 percent special education. As you can see, we have a wide variety of students in our school considering we only have 331 students.

## Slide 9

ERIN: For national recognition, as Peggie mentioned, we have won the EPIC award; the slide says four consecutive years, but we did find out last week that we have received that award for the fifth consecutive year this year. We have also been featured in a book about urban charter schools and a documentary film called *Beating the Odds: Inside Five Urban Charter Schools*. So, there are a lot of really wonderful things that we have been able to pass along to other schools around the nation, and we're excited and happy to share anything that we can with other schools to help them achieve the same successes that we've been able to achieve.

## Slide 10

ERIN: I'm going to talk a little bit about closing the achievement gap. We want to spend today discussing how our approach has led to closing the achievement gap for ELLs. We have shown that we can do that, as for the past four years we have closed the achievement gap. This slide will show you the MCAS [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System] proficiency difference between our Hispanic students and low-income students versus white students in the state. Again, the numbers vary from year to year, but in 2011 we had again demonstrated that we can close the achievement gap and outperform white students in the state of Massachusetts.

## Slide 11

A little bit more about that. In addition to those statistics, we've also achieved high levels of academic success across grade levels at CDCPS. For those of you who are out of state, our high-stakes test is called MCAS. It is given in grades three through eight for math and ELA [English language arts], and also for science in fifth and eighth grades. Just some highlights from this past year's MCAS:

- Our fourth-grade class for English was in the top 6 percent of all of the elementary schools in the state.
- Our sixth graders were in the top 6 percent of all of the middle schools in the state for English.
- For math, Grade 5 was ranked third of all 878 elementary schools in the state last year.
- Grade 6 was first of all 556 middle schools in the state.
- Grade 7 last year was in the top 11 percent.
- Grade 8 was in the top 1 percent of all elementary schools in the state.

For 13 of the 14 tests taken last year, we had a higher proficient percentage than the state, and for the other one we were equal with them, with the state. We also have a lower failing percentage than the state for all of the 14 tests.

## Slide 12

PAT: We are an English immersion school. We have two teachers in every classroom, grades K through 4, so that helps to differentiate instruction for all of our students. The coteaching model and the teaching teams that we have are able to address the needs of each student in every subject, so when you walk into a classroom we might have the two teachers who belong in the classroom along with a reading specialist, a generalist, and ourselves, as heads of school, in there teaching those children. Smaller groups allow for more differentiation, which allows the students to get the individual attention they need. We have team meetings that happen every other week where we bring the team together to discuss the data on each of our students and what needs to be done for their success, which drives their instructional plan (we'll talk a little bit more about this later on). The

point is it takes a whole team to get all of this done, and that collaborating and teaching team is what's important for everyone. The curriculum is very centered around best instructional practices for everyone, so that includes our ELLs, that might include our special education students [AUDIO SKIP] that you'll be hearing about today help everybody gain their success [AUDIO SKIP].

ERIN: [AUDIO SKIP] We do develop personalized instructional plans for our ELLs, and those we write yearly; they really specify the instructional focus for each student individually and how it will be carried out in the classroom based on their level of proficiency. The way we look at it really is that our teachers in the classroom provide the direction for the whole team, but there is, as Pat mentioned, a strong team approach. We do realize that it takes many people with many different educational backgrounds and expertise to be able to close the achievement gap for these students.

## Slide 13

We are a small learning community, as we talked about at the beginning, with 331 kids. We have three separate buildings, so we have three heads of school. Each head of school is responsible for slightly more than 100 students. Pat mentioned before as well that we were former teachers at CDCPS, so we come with that perspective—to be able to have an eye into the classroom and what the teachers are dealing with, and how to help them be as successful as possible. We are instructional leaders, so we spend very little time behind our desks looking at budgets and working with bus issues. We are teachers, we are coaches; we are responsible for evaluating and driving all aspects of the curriculum, assessment, and instruction. We help refine student goals, we teach, we design curriculum, we design assessments, we know exactly what [AUDIO SKIP] single [AUDIO SKIP] classroom.

In addition to that—something that's pretty unique about our school—teachers really drive their own professional development, and we use teachers to provide professional development and to act as coaches for others. We recognize the amount of talent that we have at our school and we really try to use our teachers to help coach teachers who may be struggling in one or more areas. Our teachers have driven a lot of the initiatives at our school, so the past few years we've really refined our approach to formative assessment. That came as some teachers were

getting together and saying that they were really interested in a particular area and wanting to really learn more about it, which then snowballed and became this formative assessment curriculum that has really been instrumental in our success. Again, our teachers were the catalysts for that and they have been the people who have really acted as the coaches for other teachers in the building. We do a lot of videotaping of teachers; we're a very open environment where teachers know that you're not going to be in the classroom with your door closed all day long. There are going to be people in there helping you—watching you—and we expect that you will do the same for your peers. So, it's very transparent.

**PAT:** I just want to say that because we're in the classrooms all the time, our teachers are comfortable with that. If I walk into a classroom at 3 in the afternoon and say, "Hey, that reading lesson didn't go so well. What can we do to fix that?", I think it's easier for our teachers to say what they're feeling about the lesson and figure out where they think that they can get some kind of professional development to help them. Because we were in the classrooms too and we can talk about it, we can suggest they go see another teacher in another classroom and do some observations. We might be able to pair them up with a mentor teacher who's had better success in that subject than they have. It helps that all of us work as a team to get the job done without them feeling like we're critiquing everything they do in the classroom.

**ERIN:** Our PEGs are our personalized education goals, and they are roadmaps to meet the needs of each student. In addition to our ELL instructional goals that we set, we also have personalized goals for every one of our students. They are very detailed goals that are set in conjunction with the teachers and the students; they work together to set those goals, again to make sure that our students are involved in their own learning and that the assessment that happens at our school is more *for* learning than *of* learning.

## **Slide 14**

Before diving into the meat of the data-driven approach that we wanted to talk about today, we did want to highlight some additional aspects of our model that were designed specifically for our ELL population [AUDIO SKIP]. These are keys to success that are really nonnegotiables at our school. If you are going to be a teacher at CDCPS, these are things that

you really need to make sure you buy into and that you make part of your daily instruction. This comes from a wide range of research that was done and a lot of consultation that was had throughout the years to make sure that our ELL program is as strong as it possibly can be.

We talk to our teachers about the fact that all teachers are language teachers all day long, so whether you teach math or you teach social studies—even our chefs in our building—everybody is aware of the fact that our environment needs to be language rich all of the time. We have a huge emphasis on vocabulary instruction; teachers are very aware of how to teach vocabulary in every single content area. There's a heavy use of academic language in our building, both by teachers and students. The bar is set pretty high for the type of language that we use as adults in our building. We don't accept slang at all. When we're in math, we're talking about products and dividends, and we are using the language that the students need to be successful with as they grow up. We use it; our kids use it. We hold them accountable for it; we hold each other accountable for it.

PAT: That happens on day one, even in our four-year-old program. When we're asking our children to pass out the papers, there's no reason why we can't ask them to "distribute" the papers. That's a great example—to add more vocabulary into their language and they don't even know that it's happening. Once we start modeling answering in complete sentences, all of a sudden they're answering in complete sentences and we don't have to do as much asking for it anymore.

ERIN: We only accept complete sentences, so starting right at four years old we're giving them sentence frames; they know that they're expected to answer in complete sentences. We celebrate words a lot through a variety of school-based initiatives: We do vocabulary parades, we have word wizard days, we post words all over our buildings, and we encourage children to use them as much as possible.

PAT: Today is Dr. Seuss Day at the Early Learning Center, so not only are we celebrating Dr. Seuss's birthday, but we have activities going on; we've invited our parents to come in and read with our children. We've been learning about Dr. Seuss and all of the stories for the past few weeks. It's become a big collaboration with an end product for everyone.



ERIN: We also, as I mentioned before, have used outside consultants to help us with this model. As a reading specialist before I became head of school, a lot of my responsibility was to look at what is the research showing us? What do ELLs really need in the classroom? We make sure that's part of our daily practice. In our building, you will hear students talking more than teachers talk, and we will talk about that a little bit later as well. There are certain things that are nonnegotiables in our building; there are things that we have to make sure are happening every single day, so that our students are successful.

## **Slide 15**

Another key to success, not specific to ELLs, but that is central to our mission and part of our culture: Last year, at the end of the school year, we were thinking about this question as we were looking at opening two new schools, trying to think about what is it that we do differently for ELLs that makes us so successful—and I think it's a really hard question to ask yourself. We turned to our teachers and we wanted to know: What do you think that we do that is different that makes us so successful? There were a series of survey questions, and they needed to rank order different aspects of our program. Overwhelmingly, the number one response from teachers was the culture of high expectations. Teachers really identified that the reason we are as successful as we are, they believe, is that we are a small environment where everybody holds each other accountable. So, 95 percent of our teachers said that the expectations for them, particularly to deliver strong student results, are exceptionally or very high. They feel that accountability, and, in turn, I think what has come of this is our students are also feeling very accountable. Our students know that they're held to higher expectations, but it's not an intimidating thing; it's a challenge for them, something they really enjoy trying to reach. We talk to them a lot about their own success, how they're doing, and when they're falling behind, even with young ones, even with the K1s. They know what they know and they know what they need to work on. Again, it's transparency; it's holding each other accountable.

## **Slide 16**

We're going to get into the data piece, but I wanted to touch upon how we at CDCPS, even though we've had a lot of success and we've had national recognition, also think of ourselves as always under construction.

We are continually evaluating, modifying, and improving our program on a daily and yearly basis. We're always looking at what our current model is and how we can make it a little bit better.

## **Slide 17**

This slide illustrates what that unique approach to data really looks like. It's obviously a cyclical process that involves assessment and student data, data analysis, curriculum and curriculum design, and then the classroom—what happens when you have the students sitting in front of you. Again, it's a continual process of analysis, reflection, and action that we, as heads of school, are constantly looking at and trying to figure out how we can make it a little bit better.

## **Slide 18**

In the next couple of slides I'm going to focus on the assessment and student data, and then the data analysis piece. In terms of assessment, data, and action planning, our process starts for all of our teachers in August. Our teachers get a lot of information from our data analyst about how their incoming students have done on certain assessments and what are some MCAS strategies that they can implement as soon as they get into the classroom in September. However, in October we get very detailed reports. We have an amazing data analyst who provides us with a wealth of information. We receive reports about incoming and outgoing students, and these reports show us subgroup performance and individual student performance for every single standard that was tested on that year's MCAS. It allows the teachers to analyze every student in their classroom, either incoming or outgoing, on what their performance was. It can help us look at the question types and which questions our students do better on versus others.

Using this analysis, the teachers can identify what we call threshold students—those are students who you can push to the next scoring category to maximize your results. We use these assessment results to formulate measurable improvement targets for the school year. We spend a lot of time in October looking at all of these data that we have from the previous year's MCAS and think about why our students did not do so well on open-response questions in fourth grade; let's analyze that. Let's now think about the kids that we have sitting in front of us and what their

weaknesses are as opposed to the kids we had last year and what their weaknesses were. Already in October, we have a lot of information about the kids who just left our class and the kids who are now sitting in front of us. Where are we going to take this information? What are we going to do with it?

## **Slide 19**

From there, we create an initial action plan that will help us look at what we are going to do between now and the next couple of weeks. Then, we start to administer what we call benchmark assessments, and these assessments are in-house interim assessments. They mirror MCAS, so they look in format just like MCAS, but they also contain the same content, the same types of questions that you would see in MCAS—the same open-response, short-answer, multiple-choice questions. These provide us real-time data so that, right off the bat, we can target and differentiate instruction. We give these tests every six weeks, and they're based on our teacher's curriculum maps, which I'll talk about in a little bit. These tests are not designed to assess everything that should be taught in the school year; they're only designed to assess what has already been taught in that time period. It's to look at the instruction that has happened and how our children are performing at this snapshot in time.

## **Slide 20**

We have a very quick turnaround for these assessments, 24 hours. We have an in-house assessment and accountability director who provides us with very detailed reports on how our children did on every single standard, every single question type. The heads of school score the open responses, so we know immediately how our children answered those particular questions. We get extensive data reports and then the whole team sits down together, which I'm going to talk about in a minute, to do an action plan process. We work together to document the strategies for the whole class—what are we going to do for all of our students because they didn't understand this one particular standard? Now, looking at this small subset of kids—they really struggled with this particular standard—and then looking at individual students—where their strengths and weaknesses lie—and how we're going to meet those students within the regular ed classroom.

## Slide 21

This is where our allocation of personnel becomes important. CDCPS, as Pat had mentioned at the beginning, really does utilize every single person in our building—our reading specialist, sometimes our PE teachers, our heads of school, our generalists. All of those people are ready and willing to go into the classroom wherever they're needed. Once we do this action plan process, we're looking at exactly where our pockets of greatest need lie, and we try to figure out how to use the people that we have to fill in those gaps. We're listing the strategies we're going to use; we're creating our flexible groups to try to figure out who needs more support—who are the people who are going to take care of those responsibilities—and then we're really pulling out the kids who are of most concern and [deciding] what we are going to do with them. How are we going to involve all of the experts that we have in the building to really make sure that we're getting to every single standard that they need additional practice with? Then, we begin our curriculum modification; we go back to our curriculum maps that we've written and say, "Do we need to tweak something? Do we need to spend more time on one particular standard? Can we speed up in one other area?"

## Slide 22

From there, we needed to come up with a way that we would keep all of this information centralized so that everybody had access to this information. We created what's called an IAS, or an integrated assessment spreadsheet. This is a comprehensive look at all of the data that we get—our MCAS data (each of our benchmark results are MCAS goals that we set for kids)—and then what the areas of improvement are for each child. It's in one centralized location located on our server, so that all teachers working with a particular group of students have access to it. We also include individual action plans for our special education students. These would be documents that coincide with student IEPs [Individualized Education Programs], so we make sure that our student IEP goals match our student in-class goals to make sure that when they're having pullout, they're working on one particular standard; it's something that was reflected on the benchmark that they definitely need to be working on. We update these after every benchmark cycle. The heads of school are responsible for going in and updating the information, so that everybody has the most current information at all times.

PAT: These sheets start at the K1 level, so we start progress monitoring everything—such as any assessments they do, any kind of formative assessments, any assessments that the K1 teachers might do—and it gives us that beginning step, so that when they do reach those MCAS [AUDIO SKIP] breakdown was, whether it has to do with reading or phonological assessment, anything that we might see that we can track before we get to those MCAS years.

## Slide 23

ERIN: Going back to the cycle of improvement, from here we're going to then be looking at: What are we going to do differently now that we have all these data, when it comes to our curriculum and when it comes to classroom practice?

## Slide 24

In terms of curriculum and classroom components, something else that's unique about CDCPS is, over the years, we have created our own substandard. We've taken the Massachusetts frameworks and we've broken them down into substandards, which is really just unpacking those state standards into more achievable goals. Sometimes, if you look at your own state standards, they can be a little bit wordy and they don't tell us exactly what needs to be taught in the classrooms. So, over many summers, we've developed substandards for our testing grade levels to help guide teachers as to what exactly those standards mean and how they relate to your curriculum map. We also paired those substandards with released MCAS questions, so teachers are able to look at what that standard looks like on a test—how it is going to be presented in a test format.

We also do curriculum mapping for every subject at every grade level. That is really just an organization of those standards, putting them into [AUDIO SKIP] units. It's a pacing guide for teachers. It lays out the entire school year and it lets [Inaudible] design what units they're going to teach at what times of the year. Obviously, the heads of school act as a big resource to them, so we can really look at: What are the power standards? What are standards you're going to need to spend more time on? Which ones will you maybe be able to spend less time on?

BBC is short for Black Board Configuration—that is a visual illustration of the teacher’s commitment to instruction. It reflects the teacher’s plan for a lesson. It has a coherent beginning, middle, and end. It’s a communication tool for everybody for that classroom. When we walk into a classroom, the BBC is posted and it will tell everybody exactly what the aim is for that lesson, what the steps are to achieve the aim, what we will be using as an exit slip. It is a good way to visually let everybody, including the students, know what they will be learning that day. The weekly BBC is our weekly syllabus with our lesson plans, and those are also kept on our server so that anybody who’s working with a particular class can go in and view them. I know when I’m working in fourth grade exactly what content is going to be covered during the week just by going in and looking at the BBC.

## Slide 25

Some additional instructional supports for ELLs after we look at that whole data piece that we’re doing for everybody... I just wanted to reiterate again that heads are responsible for providing instruction, so when we do our action planning process all heads of school are part of that plan. We have a responsibility and we’re held accountable just like our teachers are for the students that have been assigned to us for a particular grade level and subject. Everybody, from our reading specialist to our special education teachers, provides instruction to special education, ELL, and regular education students. All hands are on deck at all times.

Our special education directors—we have two—one who works with the Early Learning Center and Lower School and one who works with our Upper School. Our special education directors are 20 hours administrative, 20 hours teacher, so they work with our ELL and special education students, but they also work with at-risk regular education students. I think that’s really beneficial. Because they have already identified students in need, they don’t need to ask a lot of questions about what has already been tried for certain students because they have already been in the trenches with us doing the hard work.

Also at CDCPS, we have very clear and explicit instructional routines. We utilize a lot of the Doug Lemov [\*Teach Like a Champion\*](#) instructional techniques. Everything we do is based on direct instruction. We make sure there’s a very high frequency of feedback provided to children, and

we ensure that students have multiple opportunities for practice, both in speaking and writing. In everything that we do, we make sure that they have the opportunity to practice those skills over and over again.

Finally, I alluded to this early, but I did really want to stress that we do have a careful balance between teacher talk and student talk at CDCPS. There's an expectation that, at the beginning of the unit, the beginning of a lesson, teacher talk is very heavy; however, as the lesson proceeds, the students take over the responsibility of the use of language. They're doing a lot more of the hard work; they're doing a lot more of the working together to determine, to figure out problem solving, and to communicate with each other about what they know and what they need to learn. Finally, we were asked to talk about some of our successes, challenges, and lessons learned.

## Slide 26

ERIN: I'll talk a little bit about... I think our success is obviously closing the achievement gap; we see this as a huge success, something that's very difficult to do, and we're very proud of that accomplishment. Our students also end up leaving in eighth grade and going to some very prestigious high schools, so we're really proud of the fact that we have given our students a lot of choice. Some of our students choose to go our local high school, some of our students choose to go to some of our Catholic schools, and some of our students choose to go off to private schools, That's what we're all about—what opportunities do they have? I think our four-year-old program is a huge success. It gives our students one extra year to come in and learn the language before the five-year-old kindergarten program, which is very academic. Finally, I think our opportunity to share. We've had the opportunity to do a lot of reach out to other schools through community partner initiatives and working with other charter schools, so we've been really excited to be able to help other schools learn from the lessons that we've learned.

PAT: Challenges: Preparing our students for assessments by grade three is still a little difficult; it's slow but steady. Our younger kids have so much that they need to learn between getting ready for school and the demands that are put on them as the grades get harder. So, we are constantly trying to figure out what we can do to have our students succeed at a faster pace and capitalize on their strengths.

ERIN: Some lessons learned: I think, over the years, we've learned that it's imperative that we have communication between grade levels to bridge the gaps in curriculum. I think that's something that we have found, over the years, has been really essential, particularly when you have three separate buildings. You can get in the mindset, sometimes, of early childhood, lower school, upper school. We've worked really hard to make sure that we've bridged the gap between all of the grade levels, so that my third-grade teachers know exactly what has been covered in second grade and exactly what is going to be covered in fourth grade. We try to make sure that transition is seamless.

I think that also, when we talked a lot about how we're under construction, I think a big lesson we've learned is accepting that we're always evolving and never settling for what we have right now; we're always trying to push each other to go further, learn more, and succeed that much more each and every year.

I think another lesson that we've learned that I find really exciting is that it's important to push your teachers, and your teachers want that. They want to be challenged. They appreciate an environment that is all about high expectations. They're not scared of being held accountable; they really crave that, as long as you have good leadership in place that also feels very accountable, I think that this is a nice way to involve your teachers in every process in your building—so not being afraid to push them, and push them professionally, and make sure that they're challenging themselves every single day.

Finally, just making sure that you're matching your philosophy and your nonnegotiables to your population of students, so for us it's really important—our nonnegotiables are about how we work with ELLs. Student talk is very important to us, whereas for other schools with different populations, that may not be as important to them. Even though you may hear about things that are going on in other schools that are amazing and you want to try in your school, they may not work for your population—so knowing your group of students and knowing what is going to really push them and what they need in order to succeed. I think with that, I'd like to wrap it up.



## Slide 27

PEGGIE: Great. Thank you both. This is very informative and very thoughtful. Thank you for sharing all of this great information with us. We do have a number of questions for you. I will kick that off in a moment. It looks like most people are on their computers. If you are on the phone and you would like to ask a question over the phone, you can raise your hand with the little guy at the top and unmute yourself with Star 6; otherwise, please feel free to enter any questions you may have into the chat. Leslie is asking for a little bit more information about your personalized education goals, so could you talk a little bit more about when you set those goals, who's involved in the process, what kind of data you use—those kinds of things?

ERIN: The process has many components to it. Our PEGS are formally written three times a year. We write them in November, we write them in March, and we write them again at the end of the school year. Within those PEGS that we write, we talk about how your student has performed, what their goals have been, and how they've been achieving those goals. Prior to writing those PEGS is where we have our formative assessment work and conversations with students. I would say those goal-setting meetings with students happen, on average, once a week, depending on the content area. In ELA and math, teachers are meeting with students weekly, at least every two weeks, to look at what goals are set for themselves in that marking term and how they are working to master whatever goals they've set for themselves. It varies from grade level to grade level and class to class, but with our formative assessment initiatives, we have tried to make sure that all teachers are conferencing with students in order to set these goals on a regular basis. The conversations come out of weekly assessments and how the students are performing.

A lot of our teachers then design independent work that they call "goal work" for the students, so student independent work would be based on the personalized education goals or the formative assessment goals that have been set with the teacher and the student, and so they might meet more frequently. Those goals might be set every couple of days depending on how the student is performing in their goal work for a certain week.

PEGGIE: Great. Then just a quick information question: What is the average class size in your buildings?

PAT: My four-year-olds, I have two classrooms—one has 16 students and the other has 20. When you hit the K2 classrooms right up through first grade, I have 22 students in each of those classrooms.

ERIN: At the lower school, which is grades [AUDIO SKIP] and the upper school, which is grades five through eight, have between 20 and 24 students in each classroom.

PEGGIE: Okay, great. Certainly one of the keys to your success is the quality of your teachers, and it sounds like you do a lot of job embedded professional development, which is a best practice. Could you talk a little bit more about the professional development that you provide? You mentioned that teachers are acutely aware of how to teach vocabulary. Leslie is asking for a little bit more detail. How is it that they become acutely aware? Do you have formal professional development? Is it informal coaching throughout the year? How does it work that your teachers are such good literacy teachers?

ERIN: I think it has evolved and it really depends year to year on how many new staff we have. At the beginning, it was a lot of formal professional development. We did a lot of, especially when I first started as reading specialist, professional development around language—how to become a language teacher all day long. Our reading specialists helped coach in the classrooms to make sure that teachers knew exactly how to select words, how to teach vocabulary. From there, it has evolved into more of a coaching model where, as I mentioned before, we do a lot of videotaping. I might be in a classroom and I might videotape a lesson that I thought was a really remarkable lesson on student talk, and then I might share it with my teachers. We might talk about it. We've also had very formal professional development where we've had consultants from all over the country come in and talk to us about best practices for ELLs, and then the follow-up to that needs to be the coaching piece, which the heads of school are responsible for.

We're definitely an environment that is not a big fan of one-shot professional development, where we pick a different topic every year that we're going to learn about. We've thought of the things that are most important to the success of our school, and we refine that year after year. We're constantly working on those goals, but at different levels, and we

differentiate that for our teachers. Some of my teachers may be the coaches, while others may need formal professional development. For new teachers, we provide a lot of supports. I actually have a couple of teachers who have asked for more training in this area because in previous school settings that they worked at they hadn't had as much training. That's where I would connect them with a teacher who is successful at it, so they could go and watch, or connect them with the reading specialist. I would provide feedback when I was in the classroom. I think just as instruction has to be differentiated for your students, your professional development has to be really differentiated for your teachers; however, we do try to stay within what it is exactly that, as a school, we need to have our finger on the pulse all the time.

PEGGIE: Great. Speaking of differentiation, Camille is asking specifically about students with interrupted formal education [SIFE]. Do you have any kids who are classified as SIFE and, if so, what additional strategies and supports do you provide for those kids?

ERIN: I'm sorry we can't speak to that as we don't have any students that are identified as SIFE.

PEGGIE: Okay. I know that you work very closely with the community, so I'm a little bit curious about how you work with parents and the community, particularly related to support for ELLs?

ERIN: We have three parent groups in our building, so we have your traditional—we call it a parent advisory board—PTO. We also have a Spanish-speaking parent organization called APA [Association of Parents in Action] and we have a special education parent group called PAC [Parent Advisory Council]—and all of those groups meet monthly. Heads of school attend them, teachers attend those meetings, and the parents really drive the content of those meetings. Sometimes, we are working with parents on the high school application process and what they need to know. Sometimes, we may pull in our reading specialists and have them talk about how to choose books with your students. We do a lot of fun activities in the evenings for parents to be involved in—like Dr. Seuss night, literacy nights, and game nights where we get parents to come out and play games with their kids, and then talk to them about the educational benefits of playing board games. Book fairs draw a lot of parents in to help.

We really encourage parent volunteers, so there are a number of events throughout the year that parents can sign up for and volunteer for. We have a dads' breakfast that happens in all three buildings. We really try to get the fathers out a little bit more, and this has been a great event to get dads in the building and let them see what their students are learning, let them network with other fathers. We've had parents involved in keeping our kids healthy and what are some initiatives that we can do to make sure we're limiting screen time and we're getting our students outside? In the ELC [Early Learning Center], we also do a lot of parent mystery readers, so they encourage parents to come and read in either Spanish or English, whatever they're comfortable with, and surprise their kids on a day and come on in and read to the class. Any way that we can get our parents into our school, we'll do it. We've had a lot of success with that.

PEGGIE: That sounds great. Do you encourage family literacy? Do you send books home with the kids? Do you give parents some guidance about how to select independent reading? How does that work?

ERIN: Absolutely. All of our children go home with books every single night. We will also provide books in Spanish if they request it. We talk to our parents about the benefits of reading in Spanish and in English and how to speak to your children in Spanish and English. I've done presentations for parents on the benefits of speaking Spanish to your children, how to listen to them read, and what kinds of questions to ask them.

We do a homework night every year where our parents come out and learn about when we send home something that says "ask them to summarize," what does that mean? What should you look for in a good summary? We do those formal events, but I would have to say most of my outreach with parents is more informal, having a parent just stop by and say, "I don't know what to do; I can't figure out this homework; I don't understand this math." And me being able to tell them, "Okay; this is what you need to look for; this is what I need from you." We have a really good relationship with parents, I think, mostly because of the fact that we do have the three separate buildings, with only 100 kids in each building, so parents know that they can call us at anytime, and Pat, Mary, and I pick up the phone constantly to lend a helping hand to parents whenever they need it.

PEGGIE: It sounds like you really have a wonderful, collaborative culture that extends from four-year-olds up until they leave you. I'm curious about the new school that you're starting. I'm wondering if there are opportunities to go higher—if you're going to add a high school, for example—or what your expansion plans look like for the future.

ERIN: I get that question a lot, especially from our parents who are starting to look at the high school process and really want us to have a high school. At this time, we are working on serving the elementary school, as many elementary school children as we can in the city of Lawrence. I think that's where our expertise lies, with elementary and middle school, and right now that's the way that we found that we can reach the most students is by sticking with elementary school, for the moment. I don't think it's out of the question that sometime in the future we may expand up, but right now... We also acknowledge that our students really deserve a high school choice process as well, and there's not a one-size-fits-all model for high school. Some of our students really excel in a boarding school environment and they've done really well there. Some of our students have done really well with a vocational school, and we still want to be open to letting them, preparing them for whatever high school environment is right for them.

PEGGIE: Great. Jenny from California is curious about time. Charter schools have lots of autonomy with time, so she's wondering about any alterations to the school schedule or afterschool activities that result in extended instructional hours or language practice for students.

ERIN: We do have a longer school day; we have an 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. school day. Our children are involved in academics from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. every single day; however, we also run a pretty extensive afterschool program. We offer activities from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m.—things such as karate. We have chess club, yoga club, science clubs, nature clubs; Girl Scouts come and run a troop out of our building. We also have a number of sports programs for the upper school, so kids are involved in cross country; they're involved in basketball, flag football, Ultimate Frisbee. We also have community service clubs. For students who are really interested in helping out in the Lawrence community, we have a pretty extensive community service group.

All of these programs do follow our daily model, so we are making sure that students are engaged in precise academic language. Most of our programs are run by our teachers, so a lot of times they stem from teacher interest. One of my teachers is really interested in yoga, so she decided to run a yoga club, and got a really good turnout for that. We also have a homework club that is every day after school except for Fridays for those students who just need a little extra support in homework. We have teachers and mentors from the community who come in and help our students finish their homework. We also run an MCAS prep program for both ELA and math, and those are programs that are an extra hour a week for students who need a little bit of extra time with strategies or particular standards. There are a lot of things that happen after 4 p.m. that continue with our daily model of language and high expectations.

PEGGIE: Great. For people on the webinar, if you have any other questions, please go ahead and enter them now. We've just got a few minutes left. I will ask one more question. I'm wondering about selection of teachers. How do you recruit teachers and select them? It seems like you need to have a pretty special kind of person with specialized skills and knowledge who can really work well in this collaborative environment.

ERIN: I think that model has also evolved—how we recruit teachers. We do a lot currently at college fairs, trying to get teachers from the Boston area who are really looking to work in a charter school environment. We're very up front with teachers when they're interviewing about what kind of an environment we are, what our expectations are, how rigorous it is, and how long our school day is. If they make it through the interview process, then we usually know that they're up for the challenge. We also require all of our teachers who come in to interview—anyone we are considering—to do a demo lesson, so they always come back and conduct a lesson in the grade that we are thinking about placing them in, just to make sure that they're as good in front of a group of students as they may have been in an interview. We really love Teach for America alums, so we're constantly looking for people who have that kind of drive and that mission, the belief in the mission that we have. I think we're really up front with them from the very first interview about how difficult it may be to work in our environment and how demanding it is, and see if they're up for that challenge.

PEGGIE: But also how rewarding it is.

ERIN: Exactly.

PEGGIE: Leslie is also asking about teacher retention. What does your teacher retention look like over time?

ERIN: It's good. We have lost some teachers for a variety of reasons [AUDIO SKIP] somewhere else, and we certainly encourage teachers to really do that if that opportunity is there for them. We've lost some teachers who study abroad in the past. There have definitely been teachers who have not been right for our school, who haven't been the correct fit, so there's definitely that in there. Overall, our teacher retention is great, and I think the fact that all three heads of school taught here speaks to that greatly.

## **Slides 28 and 29**

PEGGIE: Great. We're getting to the end of our webinar, so I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the participants and really extend a special thank you to Erin and Pat for joining us here today and sharing some of the keys to your success. This is the third webinar in our ELL series. There's a link on your screen; you're welcome to go there and check out the other upcoming webinars that we hope will be equally as compelling as Erin's and Pat's presentation. This webinar will be archived at the website that you see on your screen within three business days. I'm going to send you to an evaluation in a moment. I encourage you to fill out the evaluation and give us any feedback on what we did well, what we can do in the future, and any other topics that you might like to see addressed in this series. Thank you everyone.